

VETERANS BENEFITS AWARENESS TASK FORCE
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION
Monday, July 12, 2004 — 9:00 AM
Room 500, Harry S. Truman State Office Building
Jefferson City, MO

In attendance:

Governor Bob Holden, State of Missouri; **David Cosgrove**, Chief Legal Counsel, Governor's Office; **John Eckhoff**, Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services; **Stan Baughn**, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Kyle Clower**, Elderly Advocate, Lt. Governor's Office; **Carl H. Niewoehner**, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary, Missouri Veterans Commission; **James Hughes**, Veterans of Foreign Wars; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Michael Stokes**, Disabled American Veterans; **Lynn Dorrell**, American Legion; **Ernie Lee**, President, MAVO; **Hal Dulle**, Deputy Director, Missouri Veterans Commission; **Mayor Charles Ealy**, Bolivar; **Mayor Bob Wasson**, Sedalia; **Mayor Lawrence Rucker**, Moberly; **Mayor John Landwehr**, Jefferson City; **Pat Rowe Kerr**, Veterans Benefits Awareness Representative; **General Michael Pace**, Missouri National Guard; **Bill Groninger**, Director, Branson Veterans Task Force

- I. Opening Remarks** – Hal Dulle, Deputy Director, Missouri Veterans Commission opened the meeting with introductions of guest. He stated the last meeting in February we had held our sixteenth supermarket with regional amount of success. At that time Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell turned over the chairmanship of the task force to Governor Bob Holden. Since February we have held six supermarkets. Mr. Dulle happily reported to the Governor that the St. Louis supermarket held at Vashon High School on June 5 was a tremendous success which ties into one of the things the Governor asked the task force to do at the February meeting. We were charged with three priorities to focus on: 1) urban areas; 2) minority areas; and 3) interface with Missouri National Guard on returning home veterans. Mr. Dulle indicated that all three of these responsibilities were met with the Vashon Supermarket. During this past legislative session the Governor approved for a Minority Benefits Coordinator position to assist us in the inner cities and additional monies to assist with Supermarkets.
- II. Remarks** –Bob Holden, Governor, State of Missouri, opened by thanking all in attendance for the work that they do and announced he is pleased with the progress that has been made, the awareness that has been occurring across the state and the Supermarkets have gone outstanding. This is truly a way that so many veterans can interact and get information at the Supermarkets. Over 549 million dollars was paid out in benefits to Missouri veterans in FY2002. That's an increase of 100 million dollars that was not received by our veterans in FY2000. This is just an idea of how successful we are with the activities we are

doing. From May 2002 till May 2004 we increased the number of veterans receiving compensation by over 4,500 claims. These are 4,500 people that deserve to have the assistance of us and the federal government that was not receiving it before. 4,500 families that know that we care about them and the sacrifices they have made. Last May alone over 48,000 veterans in our state received compensation. The last meeting the Governor directed that the task force to place focus on was in major metropolitan areas, minority veterans and new veterans from the National Guard so that when they come home they know that have someone that cares about them and works with them. June 5 we held our Veterans Supermarket at Vashon High School in St. Louis with a total attendance of more than 2,000 people and 1,681 veterans registered. 259 VA claims were filed on that day. Part of our outreach program the Missouri Veterans Commission along with the Missouri National Guard are using the Freedom Salute Ceremonies to reach all returning guards men and women about benefits. The Governor stated he his pleased to announce that since we last met he signed into budget and law that included a recommendation for additional \$50,000 into our outreach programs and create a new position called a Veterans Coordinator to move this outreach effort. He stated this Veterans Coordinator he believes is extremely important in what were doing because too many soldiers come back and wonder why they got left behind. This is an effort to reach out there and give them the services they need. The Governor stated he wants to hear from the task force on where else we need to go, what we need to be doing, and how we need to be organizing our effort more effectively. He encourages all the task force to be actively engaged in furthering this discussion. Missouri ranks second in the nation in how we treat veterans behind Oklahoma who is number one and we want to continue to improve on that. We want to do the things that make a difference, do the things that enhance their lives, we want to do the things that help them bridge the transition back into society once their military service overseas in completed.

- III. VBATF Update** - Stan Baughn, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness, thanked John Eckhoff and Kathy Sturgeon for their hard work involved in the Vashon Supermarket. 1,682 veterans registered at the event and 49 claims were filed. He stated over 6,000 veterans have been served through the Supermarkets and the Hotline number has received over 6,000 calls to date. Mr. Baughn stated there is a need to reach the Northwest rural area of the state and Central Missouri. Governor Holden stated that the number of the returning soldiers, we might want to pay attention to some of the demographics to make sure we are covering some of those areas were they come from. Mr. Baughn provided the Governor a copy of the 2004 Missouri Per Capita Compensation/Pension graph listed by county which shows areas above and below state average.

Pat Rowe Kerr, Veterans Benefits Representative, is working deligitly on the Support the Troops events and assisting injured soldiers with securing funds from service organizations and foundations for additional expenses not covered by DOD. She stated MVC is looking at some of the unmet needs and looking at

some of the things the service organizations are providing to families for these needs. The next Support the Troops event will be held on August 13 on the Southlawn of the Capitol Building.

On October 23, 2004 the Commission will host the first “Trekking for the Troops” event on the Katy Trail. This will be a fundraiser for the MVC Foundation, Inc. The Governors Council on Health & Physical Fitness endorses this event and will assist us in advertising to get participants. More information will be coming out on this in the upcoming weeks. We are also working with the National Guard on the “Soldiers for a Day Program”.

- IV. VFW** – James Hughes reported to the task force on the “Hidden Heroes Program” project sponsored by the VFW. This program has been in existence for 1 ½ years and is in conjunction with Missouri Veterans Foundation. This program is designed to look for families of deployed soldiers through the five Missouri National Guard family PX locations (Cape Girardeau, Jefferson Barracks, Jefferson City, Kansas City, Joplin/ Carthage). The Chairman of this program is George McClintock and he can be reached at 816-858-5858 for more information. In the last four to five months the VFW has placed over \$100,000 in food and products into the families hands from the PX sites.

The national “Unmet Needs Program” also ran through the Missouri Veterans Foundation assists families not covered by other sources. This is a cash grant program with over 1.5 million dollars. The VFW encourages people help find these veterans and service members. For more information you can visit their website at www.vfw.org

Mr. Hughes also noted that all packages for soldiers should be directed to the family support coordinator.

Mr. Hughes shared a letter from Secretary of Department of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, to the VFW that the VA is assisting returning soldiers with two years from their discharge date with medical treatment at a VA hospital at no cost if discharged from active duty and the illness or injury is related to active duty service.

Governor Holden stated that one of the things the Governor’s office is currently working on finding ways how we can be helpful to the families of soldiers who have lost their lives or severely injured with tuition.

James Hughes noted that many corporations throughout the state are willing to donate manufactured items that they are no longer producing on line if they are contacted.

- V. Branson Veterans Task Force** – Bill Groninger, Director, informed the task force members that the Branson Task Force is developing a program called the

American Veterans Task Force. This program is created to educate children on patriotism, "Site and Sounds of Freedom".

November 5 through November 11 Branson will hosts 150,000 veterans and their families during Veterans Week.

June 13-19, 2005 Branson will host "Welcome Home Tribute to Vietnam Veterans" and would like to invite the Governor and the Missouri Veterans Commission to participate in this event. This is the first National Welcome Home celebration for those who served during Vietnam. They anticipate 100,000 Vietnam Veterans to attend. Ross Perot has been extended an invitation to participate on the Welcome Home Committee.

VI. Governor's Mayoral Advisory Committee - Hal Dulle advised that five new Mayors had been added to the Committee bring the total number to nine. Here today Mayor Charles Ealy, Bolivar; Mayor Bob Wasson, Sedalia; Mayor Lawrence Rucker, Moberly; Mayor John Landwehr, Jefferson City. The advisory committee, made up of mayors from across the state, is tasked with creating a community-involved plan to connect local veterans and their families with their earned and deserved benefits. Governor Holden asked the Mayors present what their thoughts were on how we can focus our energies to encourage Mayors to be participants and how do you think the Mayors could be most effective in their communities. Mayor Wasson stated that his community recently held a bar-b-q for veterans on Veterans Appreciation Day held on the lawn of the courthouse. Approximately 400 veterans and families attended. He stated the interest in there but he stressed his concerns with the follow-up. He advised the Mayors Committee needs more direction on how to capture the veterans once we have made the contact. Mayor Ealy reported he has had tremendous success in his community. He stated he has a board of twelve individuals that work to promote veteran awareness at events in his area. Mayor Rucker reported he works closely with leaders and service organizations in his community.

VII. VVA- Carl Niewoehner reported for Alan Gibson, Chair for the Vietnam Veterans Committee that VVA recently did a study and of the 6,500 soldiers called up from Missouri, 62% of the men and women our business owners. Information will be sent out to members of the task force regarding VVA's study.

Mr. Niewoehner stressed his concerns with the VA budget and veterans getting their benefits and the waiting periods. Governor Holden asked if there is hesitation of veterans stepping up for assistance if that is an issue then maybe we need to focus our outreach efforts at family activities: football games, sporting events and school activities. Possibly work through the police, fire and emergency response departments to come into contact with these veterans. He stated we need to continue to look for venues along with our Supermarkets to reach these people. The Governor stated he also needs to be contacted if anyone

hears of a returning soldier whose job was not held back for them during their active duty.

Pat Rowe Kerr stated that the SBA has recently put out a regulation that if you were in private business and are having problems regenerating that business since returning from active duty there are some funds that bypass the normal SBA regulation. There is however only a 90 day window to apply for this funding.

Sharon Keith informed the Mayors the STV Program has Veteran Service Officers in 112 counties of the 114 counties in Missouri to assist veterans with VA claims and benefits. There are some specific benefits for specific veterans that we need veterans to know about.

Ms. Keith reported the toll free hotline 1-866-VETINFO directs calls to Service officers. These calls are answered within 5 working days or a report is sent to Ms. Keith, Director Service to Veterans Program for follow-up.

VIII. Missouri National Guard– General Pace, Missouri National Guard reported that the Guard has been holding “Freedom Salute Ceremonies” for returning soldiers. These ceremonies (luncheon, banquet, family day) are held across the state recognizing soldiers and the Veterans Commission has taken part at these events and handing out packets to the soldiers with information regarding benefits. These ceremonies are scheduled 60 to 90 days from the date of returning home. The Missouri National Guard has mobilized over 5,000 soldiers with 3,100 currently deployed. Within the next 30 to 60 days approximately another 500 soldiers from a unit in Jefferson City will be deployed.

IX. American Legion – Lynn Dorrell, State Adjutant, reported that the American Legion has had a program in place for many years called the Temporary Financial Assistance Program (TFA) a grant program which offers assistance to veterans not necessarily a legion member who has children at home and is in financial need. The veteran can contact the local post or the State or National Association and a representative will visit with these folks and justify a need for financial assistance. The National Organization issues the checks.

The American Legion is also involved in a joint effort with the Missouri National Guard in the Family Support Network offering assistance to deployed soldiers families who are need of help with emergency needs or home upkeep needs while their spouse is deployed.

X. Minority Veterans – Hal Dulle reported on behalf of Carson Ross, Chair of Committee. A Minority Benefits Coordinator position was approved this session. The Committee is in the process of putting together a small group of noted minorities to help establish this program. Some of those individuals include: Lin Appling, Missouri Public Service Commission and Kelvin Simmons, Director, Department of Economic Development.

- XI. Resource Committee** – Carl Niewoehner requested to receive a budget from the Task Force for expenses associated with Supermarkets.
- XII. Metropolitan Area** – John Eckhoff, Veterans Service Manager St. Louis County Dept. of Human Services reported the first Supermarket started in 2002 and was held at Florissant Civic Center and assisted 500 veterans. Overall six supermarkets have been in the St. Louis area: two in the City of St. Louis, two in St. Louis County, one in Jefferson County and one in Franklin County. October 2nd a Supermaket is planned in Lake St. Louis. Cedar Hill/High Ridge area is showing an interest in having a supermarket in that area. At the Vashon High School Supermarket 1,682 veterans registered and 80 agencies participated at the event. In June the VA processed 500 claims which they believe is the effect from the Supermarket. Many calls came in from that event. There is many concerns that some veterans did not get assistance at Vashon due to the large attendance we need to be careful to make sure we can accommodate those veterans attending. Ms. Keith will send out follow-up letters to all those registered veterans offering assistance.
- XIII. Returning Veterans** – Ernie Lee, President, MAVO reported the committee has met with Colonel Cairer and is working with the Missouri National Guard on the “Freedom Salute Ceremonies” and stated we need to look at another follow-up from that after 60 days. He expressed his concerns with the Reserve Units in that we need to work on contacting these soldiers when they return. Welcome Home letters from the DD214 should be mailed out from the Missouri Veterans Commission.

Mr. Lee serves as the current President of the Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations (MAVO). MAVO is made up of 21 members representing 21 veteran organizations which focuses on the needs of the veterans and established legislative priorities each year in veterans issues.

BREAK

Break Out Session

The committees met in break out groups.

